

310 442
D49C

PRICE ONE PENNY.

A Crisis in the Education of the Governing Classes of England

BY

ALEX. DEVINE

*Headmaster of Clayesmore School,
Pangbourne, Berkshire*

LETCHWORTH & LONDON :
GARDEN CITY PRESS LTD.

Return this book on or before the
Latest Date stamped below.

University of Illinois Library

AUG 20 1955

JAN - 7 1968

MAY - 7 1969

L161—H41

17 52
54
1179
1179
1179
1179

A CRISIS IN THE
EDUCATION OF THE
GOVERNING CLASSES OF
ENGLAND

BY

ALEX. DEVINE

Headmaster of Clayesmore School, Pangbourne, Berkshire

370.942

D49c

Educ

A CRISIS IN THE EDUCATION OF THE GOVERNING CLASSES OF ENGLAND

WITH rare exceptions the cultivated classes hold Educational questions in contempt and treat them with indifference.

The Public Schools are not leading—they are lagging behind; and there is good reason to know that their difficulty in getting suitable masters increases year by year. At any rate it is noteworthy that the brightest intellects of our Universities seldom choose Education as their vocation.

This, as it concerns the upper classes of society, is all as bad as it well can be; as soon as the schools of the governing classes cease to lead, and merely mark time, they cease to wield the power they assume.

I shall endeavour to set forth some of the causes of this apathy, some of the grave national perils this indifference arouses, and, as it appears to me, the “way out.”

4 A Crisis in the Education of

When we turn to an examination of the Public School system in England we are confronted with the following facts.

Firstly, the astounding indifference of the general public to matters of Education; secondly, that the profession of the schoolmaster is wholly lacking in organisation; thirdly, that our present Public School methods are out of date, and that the results of the present system constitute a grave menace to our national life and international relationships; and lastly, that the Public Schools are so highly conservative and tradition-bound that they cannot reform themselves, and require the intervention of a State inquiry.

Although the question of Education affects every parent deeply, for since the duty of deciding "what is my boy to be" confronts him sooner or later, yet it is evident that the average parent confines his practical interest in the schools to his traditional privilege of merely grumbling.

About two years ago Sir William Preece drew public attention to the lack of public interest in Education, in a very practical and forcible manner. He pointed out that whereas large sums of money were raised for charitable purposes, the amount devoted to the furtherance of Education (except at the Universities and more especially under the will of that far-seeing statesman, the late Cecil Rhodes) had been absurdly insignificant in recent years. England has cause to remember with gratitude a

the Governing Classes of England 5

time when men of wealth and public spirit counted it a great honour to endow schools or to contribute substantially to the advancement of Education. It seems very unlikely that posterity will be indebted to us in anything like the same degree that we are to our forefathers, and what can be more significant than the marked contrast in this matter, afforded us by our formidable trade rivals, Germany and America?

But this apathy displays itself in a more directly personal and individual direction. The parent's choice of a Public School for his son is nearly always determined by any reason except the right one. Often there is no selection at all: the boy is sent, as a matter of course, to his father's old school. That the personality of the headmaster is a very important factor in a school's success, that a new man may occupy the position and the School have undergone radical changes since the parent went there, does not affect the latter's decision in the least; and the choice of a Preparatory School is generally made in a simliar haphazard fashion. The soundness of the individual master's views on Education, the importance he attaches to methods of teaching—this does not enter into the decision at all.

Occasionally one sees a headline in a newspaper, "Deputation on Education to the Premier," which at once raised the hope that some brave spirits have made an effort to interest the most important

6 A Crisis in the Education of

and busiest Minister of the State in improved methods of teaching or in some practical aspect of Education. Perusal of the article, however, reveals the melancholy fact that the deputation consisted of the partisans of some particular religious denomination whose minds are exercised about sectarian teaching in schools!

Mehercule! and *this* is the popular conception of *the* Education question!

Measured by action, it is plain enough that the British parent has no serious interest in Education and its reform, nor does he perceive that the nation is affected seriously by our present *laissez-faire* policy, and that the call of His Majesty King George V. when Prince of Wales, "Wake up, England!" sounds first and above all others as a call to the Public Schools of this country.

The problem is further complicated and aggravated by the fact that the direction of Education is, within the limits imposed by the Universities, left absolutely to the schoolmaster. In the absence of any influence from public opinion and any wholesome pressure from the State, Education has undoubtedly got out of touch with the corporate life of the community. That, there can be no question, is bad for both. It was perhaps to have been expected that this would happen. Take the typical schoolmaster, and you will find that ninety-nine times out of a hundred his experience has been confined to the Public School as pupil, the

the Governing Classes of England 7

University, and then the Public School once more, this time in the capacity of teacher. Not only has he in most cases never been trained how to teach, but he is seldom familiar with "practical politics," actual life in the Army, Navy, Industry, and Commerce, the Public Services generally, or the everyday duties, problems, and concerns of Civic life. How is he, then, to be expected to correct his own limitations, the inevitable result of his rigid scholastic training and his cramped experience?

My second contention is that the scholastic profession itself not only lacks adequate public interest but is without even the merest semblance of internal organisation.

No other profession is thus unorganised. Does the British public generally appreciate this fact, and do they realise what it means?

There are very few professions which involve such a severe strain upon the brain, the spirit, and consequently upon the body, of an earnest and conscientious man as the vocation of the schoolmaster. In view of the demands which their ordinary duties make upon them, it is extremely doubtful whether they would be able to effect a sound, adequate, and apposite reform in the curriculum of studies in Public and Preparatory Schools, even if they commanded the resources of internal organisation; but the absence of it constitutes an insurmountable barrier to the attainment of any sort of reform, good, bad, or indifferent.

8 A Crisis in the Education of

Herein, too, lies the explanation of the phenomenon that schoolmasters as a whole are miserably underpaid, to the obvious detriment not only of the profession but of the public. Many valuable men who would otherwise become teachers reject the call and adopt other careers, because there is no inducement to respond to it. The mischiefs, the impediments, the wrongs, and sometimes the injustices that arise from this condition of affairs, only those can know who, in a spirit of self-sacrifice and to the best of their ability have devoted themselves to helping with all their strength to raise Education out of the slough in which it is sinking.

I do not mean to make the foolish and unjust statement that the schoolmaster is blind or in any way indifferent to the public apathy or the lack of organisation in higher Education. I do not believe it for a moment, but it is evident that our present Public School system is not only out of touch with modern changed conditions, but also that the main current of modern tendencies flows past the Schools, not through them.

The crisis through which the country is passing is political only so far as commercial and industrial conditions affect politics: "Notre siècle," said Victor Hugo, "va voir un accomplissement." He was right—the nineteenth century saw the substitution of Industrial and Commercial for Military warfare. Great Britain, last century, thanks to the

the Governing Classes of England 9

devastation wrought by the Napoleonic campaigns abroad, obtained a lead of almost half a century in the race for trade. This start we utilised to the greatest advantage, and if our progress during the second half of the century had been proportionate—making due allowance, of course, for the new factors which came into the equation—to that of the first half, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that our position now would be far more satisfactory. The genius of our inventors, the ability and energy of our captains of industry, our marine instincts and adventurous spirit, gave a tremendous impetus to our commerce; the skill of our workmen and the enterprise of our merchants were beyond comparison. One historian declares, that as recently as little more than thirty years ago, we were a century in advance of our rivals. Now we are constantly being told that we are a century behind them: and though this is, of course, an exaggeration, we cannot acquit ourselves of blame for letting such a sneer become possible. Out of date, and in many respects inefficient, we certainly are, for the evidence is too strong to be controverted; but our case is not quite so bad as is asserted. Germany has been, and is still, gaining on us hand over hand in national advancement. She has captured so much of our trade that “Made in Germany” is a household word; and she evidently means to keep it, whatever we may infer to be the other possible contingency for which her big navy

10 A Crisis in the Education of

is required. However, let alarmists speculate as they will upon the danger of a German invasion, there is no disguising the fact that we have reason to devote our most serious attention to the Industrial and Commercial progress of our Continental competitors—Germany especially—in view of our own depression. We have indeed cause for misgiving when we take stock of the situation. It is not merely the construction of “Dreadnoughts” or the readjustment of our fiscal methods that will suffice, but it is *at root* the reform of our Educational system as it affects the sons of the governing classes that will tell most in the direction of national efficiency. The rise of Germany and our own comparative decline clearly demonstrate that Education is not a negligible quantity when a nation’s power and success are involved. Other causes undoubtedly contribute to a country’s rise and progress or decline and fall, and some of these, in the latter case, it is true, even a perfect system of education would be powerless to counteract; but such causes are beside the purpose of this article and therefore outside its scope. The point is that sound and effective Educational theory and practice must be assigned a place among the matters which are of the utmost importance to a State. In the United States and Germany this truism receives practical recognition, but in England it is otherwise.

Let us take the case of Germany in order to

the Governing Classes of England 11

prove the main contention, as she is our nearest most formidable rival. It may be as well to remind ourselves in passing that what may be said about Germany applies also, *mutatis mutandis*, to the United States. As has been pointed out, there was a period when, as the result of merit, highly favoured by circumstances, our Industrial and Commercial supremacy was unchallenged, but a great change has come over the face of the world, a change that seems to hit us harder than it does any other nation. The question we are bound to ask ourselves is: "What have we done to meet the new conditions?" The Arts and Sciences are nowadays largely affected by the fluctuations of material prosperity, being advanced or hindered as funds may or may not be forthcoming for purposes of research, experiment, and the diffusion of such results are found to be valuable. Trade may therefore be said to command this age. National success in one direction is, as a matter of history, usually accompanied by correlative success in others: "art thrives most where commerce has enriched the busy coast." This is strikingly exemplified again and again. We can no more afford to despise trade than we can the health of our bodies. The moral is obvious. Germany's progress and our stagnation are not a caprice of fate, though this explanation is accepted as adequate by many dissatisfied and unthinking persons. The Germans know better; there is some

12 A Crisis in the Education of

justification for the verdict that "in determining what ought to be done they perhaps exceed every people in the globe." They long since decided that a boy's training should be based on the principle that the true purpose of Education is to prepare and equip a boy for successfully undertaking those things which he will be called upon to do when he becomes a man. The modern German is a highly developed individual, the product of a *reasoned* education which teaches him how to keep himself abreast of every advance of knowledge, to avail himself promptly of any technical improvements, and to adopt and adapt the most effective methods and organisation: in a word, he has been prepared for the business of life. He is essentially scientific, yet he is able to appreciate and contribute to European culture: this fact is significant in view of the arguments employed by the champions of the purely traditional, classical, or literary theory of education.

The sequel to the efficiency of the German Educational system, in comparison with ours, is only too evident in its effects upon our own trade. Our danger lies in a pronounced tendency to disdain and deplore the co-ordination of Education with national needs and services. It is not more "Dreadnoughts" that we require so much as a Reform—or rather a Renaissance—of Education. For example it is not sufficient that the boys who are destined for our Army or Navy are as brave

the Governing Classes of England 13

and as resolute as of yore. Modern warfare is reduced to a business and a science—indeed, this is the Age of Scientific method. Commerce likewise has undergone a transition: and Education must inevitably find a *via media* through the new complex conditions which have sprung up. Germany anticipated the occasion and rose to it. Can it be disguised that the secret of any national suspicion or jealousy arises almost entirely from trade rivalry and trade fear of Germany?

It is because Germany has planned and instituted a system of Education which fulfils the requirements of the nation, while we, according to the highest authorities and the admission of the most wide-awake and earnest teachers, have been stagnating for nearly forty years (in respect of Secondary and Higher Education), that a grave distrust is widely entertained of schoolmasters collectively. The situation is accentuated by the fact that our primary education, which has made such astonishing progress (too much, some people think), was guided, stimulated, and in a considerable measure effectualised by German ideals and methods. Is it to be wondered, then, that the layman lacks confidence in his son's preceptors as out of touch with modern conditions of life, when, in spite of an expensive education, "the ordinary boy of 15 exhibits all the symptoms of a mind dazed by unsubstantial images and formulæ of which he has never known the content," and that, disappointed, he exaggerates in his mind the value

14 A Crisis in the Education of

of foreign languages and similar *practical* studies? Even at that early age, apart from the sheer waste of time, great and perhaps irreparable injury has been done to the boy's mind : and unfortunately the process which has produced such a deplorable result is often continued long after the age mentioned. Does this augur well for the individual's and the nation's success in the "business of life"? The public, naturally, blame those who are entrusted with the instruction and training of the rising generation; the schoolmaster accuses the larger scheme of things in which he is a unit : the State looks on, and extends a helping hand to neither! It is time that with one common consent we abandoned the childish illusion that "trade will follow the flag" as a matter of course: *it will not, unless Education precedes it.* Our reverses and defeats are attributable to our want of adaptability, competent methods and scientific attainments for lack of which we are incapable or unwilling to improve our opportunities and turn our experience to good account.

Our neglect to study foreign markets and our failure to see that we are no longer in the position to dictate to our customers as we were fifty years ago, is absurd. Our traditions have been a profitable asset to us, but whether for good or for ill the world does not go on for ever implicitly accepting traditions and submitting to them. We are not going to score to-day on mere Public School traditions.

the Governing Classes of England 15

The causes of all the evils which I have indicated—the apathy and distrust of the general public, the absence of settled and authoritative professional guidance, and the lack of real solid training in our schools for the business of life—are numerous, and, under the present unsystematic system, ineradicable. One of those most productive of trouble and hindrance to an improvement in the situation is the divergence of views among schoolmasters themselves as to what is the true end of Education, what subjects are essential for acknowledged objects, and the correct and proper methods of teaching them. The Headmaster of Eton says, in his recently published work on Educational reform: “The discussions in that body” (*i.e.*, the Head-masters’ Conference), “which have often been derided as ineffective, are so, in a certain sense, not because members of the Conference have not the courage of their opinions, but because their opinions seldom coincide: indeed, if they had a little less courage there might be more agreement.” Then there is the cast-iron fabric of tradition in which the chief Universities are confined, which in the Public and Preparatory Schools has its counterpart in the neglect of the average boy, or in his premature specialisation and cramming: in either case he is a sufferer. In effect the older Universities dictate the curriculum of the Public Schools, which in turn dictate that of the Preparatory Schools, and either a sound educational

16 A Crisis in the Education of

ideal or sound finance has to be relinquished. It is no exaggeration to say that the key to very much of the mischief lies in the fact that the Universities dictate the whole of the curriculum of the Public School (and consequently the Preparatory School) on the assumption that every boy is designed for a University career! An inquiry from head-masters as to the statistics of entry at the Universities on the part of boys leaving the schools would be very interesting, and not a little astonishing. As a result there has arisen a wrong and grievous spirit of competition which is prone to degenerate into mere pecuniary rivalry in many schools, whose equipment and *personnel* are capable and worthy of a far nobler aim. In how many of the four hundred or four hundred and fifty Preparatory Schools in this country do circumstances permit a master to teach by the methods and along the lines which his knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm would bid him adopt? The literary traditions or the requirements of excessive specialisation which prevail at the Universities, and necessarily enmesh the Public Schools, preclude such a possibility for the simple reason that from 80 to 90 per cent. of the boys in the Preparatory Schools are of average ability or below it. To put the matter in another way: these boys are in a greater or less degree, according to the varying capability with which these schools are managed, sacrificed to the interests of a minority who are more richly endowed by

the Governing Classes of England 17

nature. This harm is exaggerated by the bane of excessive awarding of prizes and scholarships on pernicious principles. The Head-master of Eton affirms that "honours and prizes herein exert a mischievous influence." The trouble having been recognised, we may presumably expect the remedy, and hope that it will soon be possible for all Preparatory schoolmasters to substitute for the cramming which goes against their grain, the rational practical training of *all* the mental faculties of all boys in order that they may honourably take their part in the life of the age into which they have been born. A system of "selection scholarships" which would effectively meet any objection that could be urged against the total abolition of scholarships, is in force at the Royal Naval College, Osborne, and with certain distinct modifications has been tried as an experiment at Clayesmore School with excellent results. Now, or never, it is incumbent upon the nation to insist upon attaining efficiency in those institutions, whose functions ought to be to take an important part in helping to ensure the safety and stability of the country by contributing to its progress in their several departments of Industry, Commerce, Science, Letters, and Art, and most of all in what is obviously the foundation of these, the preparatory training of the sons of the governing classes of society.

If all that has been said is true, can these conditions continue, and the upper classes of

18 A Crisis in the Education of

society, the governing classes, maintain that influence that their higher opportunities and wider leisure for Education naturally would give them? It hardly seems credible. Every motive of public prudence, national efficiency, and national welfare, every sentiment of progress, every hope of the future, all plead for the adoption of the most effective practical method of re-vitalising Public School Education, and my deep and firmly-held conviction is that nothing but the appointment of a Royal Commission of Inquiry as to the Educational methods of the Public Schools will affect this.

Obviously, some counteracting influence from an outside body, possessing a practical and comprehensive knowledge of what is required of England's sons in order that they may be successful in their life work, is a *sine qua none*. The masters of our Public Schools are scholars and gentlemen, but they are men of academic mind, narrow in a rather fine way, highly conservative, and tenderly loyal to tradition. A distinguished statesman, whose name I am not permitted to give, writes to me as follows on the subject of Educational reform: "I should have thought that the headmasters of the Public Schools could, by discussion amongst themselves, formal or informal, do all that was required in the way of reform." This is not feasible, for the schoolmaster creates his own difficulties, and then discusses them: he writes about them, talks about them at conferences, and,

the Governing Classes of England 19

so far as he is concerned, that is the conclusion of the whole matter, for Private and Public Schools stand in the same position as the old close Corporations.

If it had been possible for the schools, with the aid of the Head-masters' Conference, to make some definite proposals for reform, they have had time for the purpose. What is there to justify a further loss of time? It is impossible to hold in suspense the present out-of-date system of education. The examples of history afford ample examples of that inevitable extinction which awaits institutions, of whatever kind, that allow themselves to become ineffective. Is it not time that the Government moved in a matter of such national importance? Education is as far removed as anything can be from mere party issues. There have been numerous Royal Commissions on matters of far less vital import during the last twenty-five years, but on Public School Education one has not been held since 1862. Fifty years, as we all know, have made a vast difference in most things. Never in the history of this country has there been such a fifty years of progress and advance in scientific methods; but have the higher schools advanced? Have they led or are they not rather lagging behind? One has only to consider the state of the schools previous to 1862 and the great reforms effected as a result of the Commission, to be encouraged to hope for much from

20 A Crisis in the Education of

another readjustment of Education at this juncture, reforms that I am convinced would be welcomed by every Preparatory and Public School master and that would restore every confidence and grant the schools a new lease of life. The problem of reform is too vast for the schools to deal with, owing to the divergency of opinion among experts and schoolmasters whose views are entitled to profound consideration; to the claims of a congestion of subjects which ought not to be ignored; to the strife of conflicting interests; and most of all to the fact that, however willing and desirous the schoolmasters themselves may be of sifting these problems, and determining sufficiently far-reaching reforms upon a sure foundation, the weight of their daily tasks precludes the possibility of their combining for the purpose, and they cannot be expected to move in this matter individually as pioneers. It is a task which can be performed effectively only by a Royal Commission: no other body can prove equal to it. That seems to me to be the only hope of finding the way out of the maze.

Much of the battle for the emancipation of Education from the fetters and shackles in which it has been bound, has been waged round the question of the postponement of Greek till a suitable age has been reached; and a few schools and schoolmasters (who have played the part of pioneers in Education) had strenuously advocated this

the Governing Classes of England 21

measure for more than ten years before the resolution in its favour was passed by the Headmasters' Conference in 1906. That was a step—but only a step—in the direction of reform, of which we are still awaiting the consummation.

Though Greek is no longer required for the *entrance* examination by the more important schools such as—to mention a few at random—Charterhouse, Tonbridge, Dulwich, Bedford, Berkhamstead, Repton, Giggleswick, Bradfield, Sedbergh, St. Bees, Dover, Uppingham, St. Paul's, Sherborne, most still demand Greek for Scholarship Examinations, and, even in some cases where it is optional, there is reason to fear that a candidate's chance of success is, I will not say prejudiced, but affected, since if he does not offer Greek, he will probably be compelled to compensate for its absence by exceptional proficiency in some other subject involving premature specialisation, one of the evils to which the present chaotic state of things is mainly attributable. It is wholly unreasonable to inflict upon a small boy three foreign languages, French, Latin, and Greek, in addition to (and too often at the expense of) his own language, English.

It is in no spirit of opposition to the Classics, indeed, the reverse, that reformers urge this total abolition of Greek at the Preparatory Schools, it is rather the protest against the abasement of Greek by making small boys cram it, who ought to be introduced to this subject later in a proper manner.

22 A Crisis in the Education of

Reform from the Preparatory School is impossible, it must come from the Public Schools which dictate to the lower schools, as they in their turn must look for reform from the Universities.

The Preparatory Schools of the country are probably amongst the best equipped of all. They are owned by private individuals, and represent a very large sum of invested capital, but excellently equipped though they may be, and devoted as their masters are to their work, they absolutely depend for their reputation upon boys passing well into the Public Schools and gaining their fair share of Public School Scholarships.

And Public School Scholarships at Preparatory Schools mean "specialisation," *and specialisation, up to 14 years of age, is educationally unsound and wholly wrong.*

The chief end of Education is the training of the mind, and a wise ability to deal with acquired facts, the arousing of delight in activity, in observation, alertness, reason, imagination, thought—not in the passive enrichment of the memory with new facts. But an ideal such as this is absolutely impossible of realisation in the face of the necessity of "cram" for Public School scholarships; a system which is wholly illiberal and strikes hard at all true ideals and conceptions of Education.

British boys are the finest material in the world, and if properly equipped will develop into men able to hold their own with, and probably in most

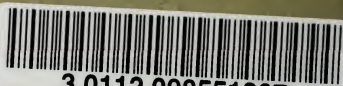
the Governing Classes of England 23

cases to go farther than, any other men in the world. Why should they be handicapped by a hollow and antiquated theory of education? That they deserve better is beyond question, for no other men make such leaders as the old boys of English Public Schools. The corresponding institutions of no other nation in the world can vie with our schools in fitting boys for government and for the exercise of authority: for in whatever other direction our Public Schools may fall short of what they could be, their training of character is unrivalled. On this point I am most anxious to avoid being misunderstood; no one has a greater admiration for the best features of the English Public School than I have, and whatever grievances parents may urge against the present state of things their increasing distrust of schoolmasters is, on the whole, unmerited. Their censure should be turned upon the *curriculum* of the Public and Preparatory Schools, not upon the men who work devotedly in them, without expectation or hope of recognition or reward (for naturally enough a profession so wholly without organisation never by any chance secures State recognition or State honours); their influence should be directed against the mistaken conception of Education which has hitherto determined the nature of that curriculum, and to the judicious amendment of the scheme of studies, so that modern boys may enter upon their careers soundly trained and liberally educated. In

24 A Crisis in Education

justice, too, it should always be remembered that the Public and Preparatory Schools are restricted and impeded by the older Universities, which, as Lord Curzon has boldly declared, are in need of "drastic reforms and a quickening spirit."

These considerations then—the organisation of the higher schoolmasters into a recognised profession, the necessity for reform in the teaching methods and curriculum of the Public Schools (and incidentally the Preparatory Schools), the abolition of early specialisation, and the bringing of Higher Education into touch with changed conditions of modern life—demand the help of, and the re-adjustment by, the State, and a Royal Commission, welcomed as it would be by all earnest schoolmasters, would render the country at this juncture a notable and profound service.



3 0112 098551267